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Politicization and Soviet Analysis at CIA

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Contentious confirmation

The Gates Hearings: Politicization and Soviet Analysis at CIA

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Editor's Note: This article uses the testimony of witnesses at the DCI confirmation hearings of Robert Gates in September and October 1991 to present the controversy over alleged politicization of Soviet analysis by the CIA in the 1980s. Though its original purpose was to provide a framework for public discussion of the issue, it is offered here as a stimulus to internal debate among intelligence analysts.

On 16 September 1991, Senator David Boren gavelled to order the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI). In the witness chair for confirmation hearings was Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates, recently nominated by President Bush to replace William Webster as Director of Central Intelligence. This was Gates's second chance to head the agency in which he had spent most of his career. President Reagan had nominated him in 1987, following the death of William Casey, but Gates—then Casey's deputy—decided to withdraw when questions were raised about how much he knew of the Iran-contra affair, which was just beginning to break.

In some ways, the timing of the second nomination was no better than the first. Gates would still have to resolve the Senate's lingering doubts about his Iran-contra role, but he would also need to confront new charges that CIA had failed to anticipate the collapse of the foreign country he knew better than any other—the Soviet Union.

At the heart of both issues was Gates's relationship with Casey. Gates, a CIA analyst with a Ph.D. in Soviet studies, had caught Casey's eye as a bright and ambitious staff assistant early in the DCI's tenure. He quickly became Casey's protégé, installed as head of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) in 1982 before reaching his 40th birthday, and elevated to the number-two position in the Agency in 1986. Casey was an

unrelenting cold warrior, and his outspoken anti-Soviet beliefs and rhetoric were seen by many CIA officers as inappropriate in an agency that prided itself on rigorous objectivity. Gates would find himself accused of imposing his and Casey's hardline view of the Soviet Union on a more skeptical CIA analytic bureaucracy.

Gates's views on the USSR were relevant to the confirmation process in two ways. First, as the highest ranking analytic manager under Casey between 1982 and 1986, Gates was the final reviewing authority on all CIA estimates and assessments of Soviet policies. Second, as a substantive specialist on the Soviet Union, he had often held forth publicly and testified before Congress on his view of the Soviet threat. In the first role, his integrity was the issue; in the second, his substantive judgment.

Gates's performance of the first role was more important in determining whether he would be confirmed. The Senators were probably willing to tolerate tardiness in recognizing the end of Communism in the Soviet Union—Gates and the CIA had not been alone on that score. But integrity was essential to a DCI. If an intelligence agency could not be trusted to be objective, it would surely be resisted or ignored by the rest of the government. The SSCI would thus subject Gates's stewardship of CIA analysis in the early- and mid-1980s to close scrutiny.

Intelligence and the USSR

A primary role of intelligence is to help American foreign policymakers make informed decisions. To this end, the intelligence agencies daily inundate the policy departments with what Gates has called a river of information and analysis. This flow includes materials as

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diverse as biographic profiles of foreign leaders, international trade statistics, locations and physical characteristics of ballistic missiles, descriptions of narcotics trafficking networks, and estimates of future conditions in various countries.

The potential value to the policy community of these products turns on their accuracy, balance, and presumed impartiality. CIA's status as an independent agency, free of the bias that can taint intelligence produced by policymaking departments, is supposed to guarantee that its only obligation is to the truth—and that it will, in Gates's words, "tell it like it is, with the bark off."

The trauma of being taken by surprise at Pearl Harbor brought CIA into being, but it was the persistence of the Soviet threat that sustained it until the 1990s. During most of the 1980s, as throughout the Cold War, the Agency's most policy-relevant analytic work was on Soviet intentions and capabilities. For more than 40 years, half of the Agency's resources were devoted to collecting and analyzing intelligence on the USSR.

At the beginning of the Casey-Gates years, the idea that the Soviet Union might soon be free of Communist rule—or collapse altogether—would have seemed like a fantasy, both to the American public and to the Intelligence Community. The unraveling of detente in the 1970s had culminated in the USSR's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, and a national consensus had begun to form on the need for stepped-up defense spending. This issue was one of several that Ronald Reagan rode into the White House in 1980.

During the first years of the Reagan administration, including most of the years Robert Gates served as Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI), US-Soviet relations were extremely tense. Reagan's "evil empire" rhetoric and the installation of short-range nuclear missiles in Europe led, as we later learned, to genuine Soviet fear of an American nuclear strike. On the Soviet side, old, ailing, and conservative leaders held sway from 1980 until 1985, reducing the likelihood of any new thinking in Moscow on how to reduce tensions with the West.

In the face of this mutual hostility, President Reagan charged William Casey with revitalizing American intelligence and combating Soviet expansionism. Casey's

passionate pursuit of this second goal made many insiders wonder if he could provide policymakers with objective intelligence on the Soviet Union. Harold Ford, a veteran intelligence officer, testified at the Gates hearings that "the seventh floor [the Agency's executive suite] had this great vision of 'the Russians are coming' everywhere in the world." Reports began to circulate around CIA that Casey was "appalled" by the product of CIA analysts and that he was rejecting what he felt were overly "soft" national estimates of Soviet activities and intentions. Commenting on a draft assessment that minimized the Soviet role in international terrorism, according to journalist Bob Woodward, Casey said, "read Claire Sterling's book [*The Terror Network*] and forget this mush."

Casey seemed especially convinced of Soviet aggressive intentions in the Third World. As Ford put it, "The Director had a thing about that, and he would often come to Congress with all kinds of big charts with red splotches" scattered throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In 1985, the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for Latin America resigned, claiming that Casey had pressed for an estimate exaggerating the implications of Mexico's normally turbulent politics and portraying that country as ripe for instability and spreading Soviet influence.

Casey's defenders conceded that he had strong opinions but denied that he imposed them on CIA analysts. "Mr. Casey was indeed impatient with analysts who cleaved to a narrow interpretation of events, and he could be intimidating," admitted Graham Fuller, a former NIO for the Middle East. "But he was willing to take as well as to give, if he had any respect for the interlocutor.... Casey respected the judgment of those who seriously defended their views." In one episode carefully noted in intelligence circles, Casey sent back an estimate reporting that the Nicaraguan contras—whom he supported wholeheartedly—had no domestic political base, only to release it when analysts reaffirmed their arguments.

It was Robert Gates, however, who was directly responsible for overseeing CIA's analytic output. Gates shared Casey's basic predisposition towards the USSR.

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The similarity of their views, presumably, was one reason Casey had been drawn to Gates in the first place. At the hearings, Graham Fuller, who worked closely with Gates, offered this judgment: "Gates did share a hard-line view, but a very well-informed view of the Soviet Union, independent of Casey." He added, "The international situation at that time, I would argue, justified a fairly hard-line view in any case." CIA's top Soviet analytic manager, Douglas MacEachin, agreed, adding that Gates "had a strong personality, he held positions very strongly, he challenged positions very heavily, and his views of the Soviet threat roughly coincided with the views of most of the people senior [to him]."

"Reading" the Gorbachev Revolution

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became head of the Soviet Communist Party, but several more years went by before the US analytic community became persuaded of the seriousness of his efforts to restructure the Soviet system. In 1986, Senator Bill Bradley asked Gates, then Casey's deputy, whether there might come a time when the Soviet Union might be open to "fundamental change." The idea seemed so far-fetched to Gates that he told Bradley, "Quite frankly, and without any hint that such fundamental change is going on, my resources do not permit me the luxury of sort of just idly speculating on what a different kind of Soviet Union might look like."

In 1991, intelligence critics in Congress, including Bradley, judged that a little "idle speculation" five years before might have helped policymakers to understand better what had happened later. The surprising political and economic collapse of the "main enemy" had left many policymakers wondering why they could not remember any advance warning of the collapse in Agency publications. Charging that it had botched its central mission, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan declared that "the CIA's useful life is at an end."

Agency insiders knew that this criticism was overdrawn and that it misrepresented the value of a great deal of sound intelligence analysis. Even some Senators sprang to the CIA's defense. During the Gates hearings, for example, Senator John Glenn said the Agency has been "faulted perhaps too much in past years for not foreseeing some things that would have required an infallible crystal ball."

Though criticism of the Agency for perceived analytic misjudgments was common, until the Gates hearings the Senate had not heard plausible allegations of systematic distortion of analysis by Agency managers. Public discussion of this issue had been limited to dissidents like the NIO for Latin America, in connection with the Mexican estimate, and journalists like Bob Woodward. In his book on Casey, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA*, Woodward left the firm (but undocumented) impression that the DCI's anti-Soviet views had a strong impact on the analytic process, and sometimes on the analytic product.

Now, in September 1991, several former Agency analysts were coming forward to allege that the CIA's Soviet analysis had indeed been "politicized" or slanted to match the views of Casey and the President. If these allegations were true, a proper analysis of the Soviet Union's mounting difficulties might not have been possible in the Agency's bureaucratic climate before Casey's death in 1987. Was the CIA guilty of suppressing intelligence on the Soviet Union?

Analysis Under Fire

The DI, one of four major subdivisions of the CIA, is charged with analyzing raw intelligence information and passing its conclusions to foreign policymakers in the form of written reports and oral briefings. The Directorate's product—intelligence analysis—is shaped by hundreds of mostly young foreign area specialists recruited from the best American universities. DI analysts are selected primarily for their ability to think logically and to express themselves clearly and concisely. A premium is also placed on collegiality, for all differences among analysts have to be negotiated and resolved in order to arrive at findings that the entire Agency can stand behind. The result is occasional friction and considerable intellectual give and take.

The DI was preoccupied by the aftereffects of a major reorganization when Gates took over in late 1981. Offices that had previously been devoted to single-discipline political, economic, and military research had recently been rearranged into several geographic offices, mixing skills in order to encourage multidisciplinary analysis. Thus, political analysts sometimes

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found themselves working for economists or military specialists, and vice versa. As Gates later noted, "There was predictable great disruption and a lot of unhappiness on the part of a lot of analysts who found their familiar worlds and surroundings turned upside down."

The new Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA) got off to a particularly difficult beginning. A large number of Soviet political, economic, and military analysts were merged into what Douglas MacEachin called a "forced culture." He recalled at the Gates confirmation hearings that "it was the only office in the DI which took whole pieces—the main core—out of the three [previous] principal offices, and put them all together." By the time MacEachin was appointed director of SOVA in 1984, the office was still in turmoil. "I knew I had a lot of hard work," he said. In a shortsighted attempt to free up more space at the Headquarters building, SOVA was physically moved to a distant building, with further negative consequences for management and morale.

A Tough Speech

"Four months after all this happened," Gates told the SSCI in September 1991, "I came along." The sudden ascendancy of Gates, who had barely a year of experience in line management at CIA, surprised and to some extent upset the conservative DI bureaucracy. He immediately heightened concerns with a speech to the entire Directorate, assembled in the Headquarters auditorium, that senior DI analysts still talk about. In it, he sent out a clear signal that the status quo would no longer do:

I have seen analysis that was irrelevant or untimely or unfocused, or all three; failure by analysts to foresee important developments or events; closed-minded, smug, arrogant responses to legitimate questions and constructive criticism; flabby, complacent thinking and questionable assumptions combined with an intolerance of others' views, both in and out of CIA...; poor, verbose writing; a pronounced tendency to confuse objectivity and independence with avoidance of issues germane to the United States and policymakers...; and analysis that too often proved inaccurate or too fuzzy to judge whether it was even right or wrong.

Gates intended to strengthen a product that he thought had been defective for years. Long before he became DDI, Gates had had problems with CIA's approach to the Soviet Union. As early as 1973, when he was still a junior analyst, he had written an article in *Studies in Intelligence* criticizing Soviet political analysis.

Returning to the Agency after spending much of the 1970s on the National Security Council staff, Gates called CIA's work in this area "flabby." He asserted at the hearings that Soviet analysts had taken an overly charitable view of Soviet foreign policy goals, thus missing the likelihood and significance of several previous Soviet inroads into the Third World—in Angola in 1975, Ethiopia in 1977, Afghanistan in 1979, and in Central America throughout the 1970s. "The need for more rigorous work was evident," he asserted. "Surveys of users of intelligence suggested it was our weakest area."

Gates told the Directorate that Casey, too, was "deeply concerned about the quality of the Directorate's work," and that he, Gates, had a mandate to bring accountability to analysis and "to implement far-reaching changes in the way we went about our business." He conceded later that some analysts and managers had been offended by the speech, arguing that they resented the "obvious intent to diminish their autonomy" and "greatly disliked the idea of accountability."

Rigorous Review

The means by which Gates intended to increase accountability was the so-called analytic review process. All major research papers written by DI analysts had to be reviewed in draft by the branch chief, division chief, and office director. Papers tended to get the closest scrutiny at the branch level, but more senior managers could and did have an impact on them ranging from simple style editing to major revisions to "killing" them outright. Though analysts chafed under this frequently long and arduous procedure, DI management had no trouble justifying it; after all, the written intelligence assessment was the DI's reason for being.

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Gates underlined the purpose and importance of this rigorous approach at the hearings:

The much-maligned review process takes the analysis of a single individual, challenges assumptions, asks questions and hopefully scrubs out the biases of the analyst, as well as others at all levels, thus turning the draft of an individual into the official view of CIA or the Intelligence Community. The process can be rough and tumble.

Now Gates proposed to add another level to involve himself directly in the review process. His predecessors had not personally approved papers unless they were going to senior policymakers. Gates intended to read and approve every DI assessment in draft, and he promised in his introductory speech to do so within 48 hours. This was designed to reassure analysts who might be appalled by the prospect of additional delay and to set an example for his managers, who had been known to allow papers to languish unread for weeks.

It quickly became clear, moreover, that the DDI's review would not be pro forma. Papers began coming back from Gates's office with numerous handwritten notes and questions in the margin. Sometimes, they were accompanied by long memorandums setting forth his detailed reactions and objections or questioning certain lines of argument. Occasionally, he recommended that papers be completely reworked or dropped.

After listening to the testimony of several former analysts during the Gates confirmation hearings, Senator Warren Rudman concluded that some of them felt "intellectually assaulted" by the DDI's blunt missives. Gates noted that he had been "very careful, and I won't say I was 100-percent successful, but I tried to be very careful never to personalize my criticisms." He also claimed that some analysts had seemed challenged by his close attention to the product.

Intellectual Warfare

Gates believed that he was bringing to the review process a much-needed "iterative dialogue" between him and the analyst. Many times, however, the hoped-for

dialogue did not take place, because analysts and managers seemed reluctant to press their case. At the hearings, Gates admitted that this had been so, and he conceded that his own style might have been partly to blame. "I am probably not the easiest person in the world to work for," he said. "I am fairly demanding, and I'm probably, at times, more direct than I might be in terms of people's egos."

Hurt feelings and damaged egos, in any case, seemed to be occupational hazards in the highly charged and demanding environment in which CIA analysts worked. Graham Fuller told the Senators that analysis was "not a game for kids." He described an atmosphere that was "full of fireworks," in which "real hardball was played." Gates himself put it best in trying to explain the turmoil: "These issues are important. And people are going to argue, and they're going to fight, and they're going to debate. This is a turbulent business. This ain't beanbag." He added, "most analysts do well in the give-and-take. But some do not."

For the analysts, even more was at stake than damage to their egos. To get promoted, they had to produce successful written assessments. "We live in a publish or perish world, Mr. Chairman," MacEachin told the SSCI. "And when an analyst gets a paper rejected, that's a serious blow. They start to think about [their] careers."

Listening to the testimony, Senator Slade Gorton proclaimed this institutionalized intellectual warfare a healthy thing. "Imagine!" he remarked, "Analysts at CIA differ from one another on the way in which they approach particular issues." He went on:

They start from different philosophical bases, they read facts differently, they weigh them differently, some are more willing than others to take leaps of faith, they argue with one another bitterly and deeply on a number of issues, they are annoyed when their views on one level are not instantly and completely heeded by others on some higher level. It sounds exactly like almost every other organization in America. And it sounds to me like a damn good idea.

Bitter Debate

Casey's reputed heavyhandedness and Gates's close scrutiny of the analysis aggravated a longstanding debate within the DI about the nature and severity of the Soviet threat. In his testimony, MacEachin described a deep and bitter division in Soviet analytic ranks between what were derogatorily termed "knuckledraggers" and "Commie symps." The former saw Soviet foreign policies as relentlessly aggressive and thought of themselves as "hardnosed realists"; the latter believed the evidence pointed to Soviet "retrenchment and retreat" rather than expansion and portrayed themselves as "rational thinkers."

The two groups, said MacEachin, were particularly divided "on the question of how much they saw Soviet foreign policy actions being driven by sort of old-line ideological concerns versus some sort of modern, practical politics." Oversimplified, the "knuckledraggers" argued that the Soviet leadership was committed to a policy of expansion and permanent hostility to the West, while the "Commie symps" believed that the USSR was motivated by "objective" national interests, and therefore behaved much like any other country.

These terms of opprobrium reflected some mutual disdain, born of prolonged intellectual combat. Each faction "tended to suspect the other's motives," MacEachin recalled, "or to suspect the other's objectivity." For 26 years, he testified with apparent exasperation, he had had to listen to these "same approaches and contests and clashes of egos." At one point, DDI Gates recalled telling MacEachin that he thought the atmosphere in SOVA was "poisonous."

Within the DI, the main exemplars of the two competing schools of thought, many believed, were DDI Gates and Melvin Goodman, who had been chief of SOVA's Third World Division until 1985. The conflict between the two, once friends and colleagues as junior Soviet analysts in the 1960s, spilled out into the Gates confirmation hearings as a blend of substantive disagreement and—on Goodman's part, at least—personal rivalry.

Gates's Chief Critic

An articulate and outspoken Soviet foreign policy specialist, Goodman had found himself increasingly at odds with Gates after the latter's promotion to DDI in 1982. In 1985, Goodman was removed from his job as head of Soviet Third World analysis—an action taken by SOVA Director MacEachin but one that Goodman believes was ordered by Gates. A year later, he was removed from SOVA and assigned to the National War College. He returned to the Agency briefly in 1989, but he resigned the following year.

Two of his colleagues testified at the hearings that Goodman's uncompromising views and energetic intellectual leadership exerted a polarizing influence on analytic debate in SOVA. Goodman's Third World Division, MacEachin recalled, seemed to regard any effort by management to defend its own views as politically motivated and "tended to see itself in a holy war with the administration." Another Soviet senior analyst testified that the otherwise "very engaging" Goodman showed "a different side in dealing with substantive conflict on the job." In explaining his reasons for sending Goodman to the National War College, MacEachin told the Senate that "Don Quixote had gone after one too many windmills."

At the hearings, however, Goodman electrified the SSCI by charging Gates with using the review process to impose his own conclusions about Soviet intentions, regardless of their evidentiary base, against the better judgment of working-level analysts and managers. He accused Gates, in so doing, of "corrupting the process and ethics of intelligence" and defending Casey's world view of the Soviet Union as "the source of all US problems in the international arena." The result, he believed, was that "data... was suppressed, particularly with regard to Soviet retrenchment and retreat." At the Gates confirmation hearings, Goodman reviewed at length several specific cases in which he felt intelligence had thus been politicized, including the DI's assessments of Soviet inroads in Iran, of possible Soviet involvement in the attempted assassination of the Pope, and of Soviet support to Nicaragua.

*Hearings***Arguing Soviet Strategy**

The dispute that especially rankled Goodman involved his own 1982 draft estimate on Soviet activities in the Third World, which found "unmistakable signs" that such activities were leveling off or declining in number. Gates found the draft unpersuasive. Upon reading it, he sent Goodman a memo arguing that the estimate overlooked the "creativity of the Soviet approach" and the "ideological and political motives that have impelled the Soviet Union to an activist role in the Third World now for more than 60 years." He also said that Goodman's work had "missed a major historical and political development in failing to point out...just how surrogates are used in the Third World. This is a fundamental flaw in the draft, in my judgment."

Angry but undeterred, Goodman continued to build his case. In 1985, he enlisted the aid of a noted scholar, who had developed a methodology for assessing Soviet influence-building efforts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. "I think methodology is very important in this process," Goodman reflected during the Gates hearings.

We looked at indicators of military aid, economic aid, Soviet advisers, ship days in out-of-area waters. And all of these indicators were either stagnant, some were even dropping. We thought we had an important message ... We thought we had good evidence.

But Goodman's evidence had little apparent impact on Gates or upon the view of Soviet foreign policy Gates presented in public. In 1986, Gates made a speech calling on Americans to realize "the strategic significance of the Soviet offensive, that it is in reality a war...against Western influence." He listed three "ultimate targets" of Soviet strategy in the Third World: "Oil fields in the Middle East, which are the lifeline of the West, the Isthmus and Canal of Panama between North and South America, and the mineral wealth of Southern Africa." Though Gates labeled these views his own, Goodman was appalled. "There was no evidence, no good evidence, that you could cite to support these charges," he exclaimed at the Gates confirmation hearings.

Goodman also argued that Gates's reaction was typical in its excessive emphasis on Soviet ideology and that it fit a larger pattern. It was easy, he claimed, for Soviet analysts at CIA to "give our best guess when the Soviets were involved in one nefarious activity after another, but we couldn't even guess at all when it meant that there were signs that the Soviets maybe were being conciliatory or moderate in some fashion." Goodman lamented the resultant loss of "all the analysis we were never permitted to say...the intelligence that policymakers never got, trends that were never reported, [and] data that was suppressed."

Perceived Pressure

Some witnesses at the Gates confirmation hearings attested to the high level of frustration in SOVA and the inclination of some analysts to distrust management's motives. MacEachin recalled a "very strong feeling that somehow we had to compensate for Casey's views." In testimony otherwise sympathetic to Gates and Casey, Graham Fuller conceded that SOVA analysts had become "shellshocked by Casey's interest in pursuing things that he thought were strategically important.... They were maybe tired of running after some of his particular private, or not so private, concerns."

Even more disturbing was the possibility that perceived pressure from the seventh floor might have caused some SOVA officers to anticipate criticism and to adjust their behavior accordingly. MacEachin recalled that a division chief once asked him, in a discussion of the analytic "line" to be taken on an assessment, "How do you want me to go on this?" MacEachin added, "I was fairly shocked about that." A SOVA branch chief testified that his people "eventually understood what would and would not get through the front office, and there developed...a self-censoring atmosphere." In his testimony, Goodman asked that the Senators try to develop "an appreciation of the feeling of intimidation that existed in that building."

Other Critics

Two other former CIA analysts, Jennifer Glaudemans and Harold Ford, came forward to add weight to Goodman's charges. These officers differed widely in experience. Glaudemans, a young Soviet specialist, became an analyst in SOVA in 1985—her first permanent Agency position. At the hearings, she acknowledged her junior standing and sometimes professed to be speaking for “people down at my level, which was the bottom.” Ford was a respected veteran of 40 years in the intelligence business, much of it with the Agency's highly regarded estimates staff.

Neither Glaudemans nor Ford could offer direct evidence of improper behavior by Gates, and neither had personally experienced politicization at the hands of the DDI. Ford even noted that Gates's working relations with him had always been above reproach. Glaudemans stated that she and her colleagues could “feel Mr. Gates's contempt” and “sense his party line.” She produced a memo from her division chief which suggested ways of “improving” the division's analysis, but the memo was neither particularly remarkable nor could it be linked to Gates. She also noted that politicization was elusive, describing it as “like fog.” Senator John Danforth appeared uncomfortable with her lack of specifics, reminding the committee that she was relying primarily on her “general perception of what was going on in the office, sort of the feel of the place.”

Ford seemed to argue that where there was smoke, there had to have been fire. Too many people he respected, he said, had complained to him about the DDI's behavior over the years for something not to be wrong. He noted that roughly 16 to 18 Agency officers had offered him encouragement and support when they heard he was going to testify against the Gates nomination. As if anticipating the charge of basing his testimony on hearsay, Ford added:

This is not a court of law. And the questions of hearsay and the evidence are a little different.... When ... people are moved from position to position...and they have told me so, and I have learned of it, because their views did not accord, to me that is evidence. When people have come to me and told me and shown me papers that they have written within the DDI that were killed, that to me is evidence.

Alleged Politicization

Among the most debated cases of alleged politicization at the Gates hearings centered on a 1985 CIA assessment of the likelihood of Soviet complicity in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1981. At the hearings, the Senators grappled with charges and countercharges about the so-called Papal paper that helped illuminate the arcane procedures and production processes of intelligence analysis but left many of them as confused and divided about the presence of politicization at the end of the sessions as they were at the beginning.

There could be no confusion, however, about the view of Casey and the Reagan administration on the attempted assassination. “Now everybody in Washington, including Bill Casey, wanted to hang this on the Soviets,” testified John McMahon, Casey's deputy from 1982 until 1986. “There was a book written on the Soviet involvement and Casey was very persuaded. And so he kept beating back on the DDI saying, you know, there has to be something to it.”

In 1983, the CIA had produced a report on the incident that seemed to rule out a Soviet role, but the lack of evidence available at the time made it unpersuasive even to intelligence managers, let alone the DCI. In response to Casey's prodding, and with the receipt of some new evidence, Gates commissioned another assessment in 1985.

The growing frustration and “shellshock” in SOVA over Casey's perceived interference with analysis guaranteed a cynical reaction to the assignment. At the Gates confirmation hearings, Goodman led the attack on this second Papal paper, *Agca's Attempt To Kill the Pope: The Case for Soviet Involvement*. The essence of his charges was that Gates had orchestrated the writing of an assessment that knowingly misrepresented the evidence and thus confirmed Casey's suspicions.

To support his case, Goodman pointed to several supposed irregularities in the writing of the report—that it was prepared virtually in secret; that it was rushed through to publication before it could be properly coordinated.

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minated with other experts at the Agency; that Gates had deleted a prefatory "scope note" pointing out to the reader that counterarguments to Soviet complicity had not been included; that its contents were misrepresented to consumers in a covering memo from Gates as "the most balanced and comprehensive work on the subject"; and that Gates had tampered with the paper's executive summary to leave a stronger impression of Soviet involvement than the body of the paper could support.

Process aside, the thrust of the paper struck Goodman as analytically illegitimate. He charged that Casey had directed Gates to "write the case for Soviet involvement." Thus, the paper, by focusing only on how the Soviets could have been behind the attempted assassination, failed to consider the case that they were not. How, Goodman argued, could such a paper be considered "balanced and comprehensive?" The final product, he claimed, put excessive credence in a "flimsy"

(b)(3)(n) source pointing to Soviet complicity (b)(3)(n)

(b)(3)(n) As a result, "the assessment was terrible. The scenario was farfetched. The analysis was tendentious."

A Postmortem

Goodman placed particular emphasis on the findings of an internal CIA postmortem, prepared by senior analytic managers several months after publication of the Papal paper. Relying primarily on interviews with analysts and managers, it had noted a widespread perception that the paper had an "unusual thrust for an intelligence assessment" and that it had "stacked the deck" by considering only the Soviet role. The report also pointed to an "inconsistency between the key judgments and the text" and observed that, in the haste to publish the paper, "the coordination process was essentially circumvented."

But was the paper politicized, or was it merely flawed? According to the author and managers of the paper, it was neither. They came forward at the Gates hearings to say that the circumstances of its publication, while unusual, were perfectly proper. Gates had apparently taken pains to disassociate himself from Casey's views. "All of us knew that Mr. Casey was strongly

inclined to believe that the Soviets had played a role," testified Lance Haus, the project manager for the Papal paper. "Mr. Gates repeated that he was agnostic about the issue.... At no point did [he] specify or suggest what our findings should be.... None of us felt any pressure to have the report say one thing or another."

The postmortem agreed. It noted that "there appears to have been a conscious effort on the part of upper management—the DDI, at least—to keep hands off the DI product in order to avoid the appearance of manipulating the analytic process."

Haus also defended the way the paper had been managed and reviewed. Though it was prepared on what everyone acknowledged to be a "close-hold" basis, it had been "fully coordinated" and "cleared by virtually everyone who knew anything about the case." Conceding that a (b)(3)(n) source had been a "key element in our conclusions," Haus nevertheless insisted that "if [the DO] had serious doubts about the source, they never voiced them to us." He proclaimed the paper "balanced and sound" and "true to the information and convincing in its argument." On the key question of the DDI's review of the draft, he declared Gates blameless.

Mr. Gates did not drop any scope note.... I eliminated it after consultation with [the coauthor]. I thought it was wishy-washy and redundant. Though he reviewed them, Mr. Gates did not draft or redraft the key judgments—I did, with help from [the coauthor]. Finally, Mr. Gates did not draft the transmittal notes, although he certainly reviewed them. Again, I did. This was standard procedure.

Several senior intelligence managers defended the Papal paper's exclusive emphasis on the Soviet role and failure to include alternate possibilities. Acting DCI Richard Kerr, a close associate of Gates for many years, called it a process of "hypothesis testing." "We do this on a regular basis," he told the Senate. "We set up a scenario and pursue that, to see if, in fact, the evidence would support it." Adding weight to Kerr's explanation was the fact that Soviet complicity was the only

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issue surrounding the assassination attempt that interested US policymakers. Kay Oliver, a SOVA analyst who drafted a contribution to the Papal paper, reasoned: "If the Soviets were not involved, it did not matter a great deal to US policy whether the Gray Wolves, Mafia elements, or Agca alone was responsible for the crime."

With all the key participants in the drafting of the Papal paper in essential agreement about the facts of the case, Goodman's argument stood undermined by his own noninvolvement with the paper and reliance on hearsay in his testimony. MacEachin also criticized his former colleague for his tendency to make sweeping charges—to say, for example, "Bob Gates rewrote the key judgments," rather than "I've heard reports" that this happened.

When some of the verifiable charges made by Goodman turned out not to be exactly true—for example, the covering memo to readers did not call the paper the "most balanced and comprehensive work on the subject," but merely a "comprehensive examination"—the tide began to turn against this challenge to the Gates nomination. Senator Rudman, outraged by what he considered Goodman's inability to substantiate many of his charges, called his testimony "an attempted assassination of [Gates's] character" and "McCarthyism, pure and simple."

Some Irregularities

Yet the postmortem did seem to have revealed irregularities in the preparation of the Papal paper. A panel of senior managers had been able to find "no one at the working level in either the DI or the DO—other than the primary authors of the paper—who agreed with the thrust of the assessment." The same group "could find no compelling reasons to rush this paper to completion without benefit of all expert views."

And Gates himself implicitly agreed that the paper was unbalanced. "In retrospect," he conceded, "the cover note probably should have indicated what in fact was the primary deficiency of the paper, and that was that it did not thoroughly examine all of the alternatives that were available.... And as DDI... I would have to take responsibility for that."

But irregularities did not necessarily add up to politicization. And the complicated discussion revealed that politicization was indeed, as Glaudemans had admitted, an elusive concept. The Papal postmortem admitted that "despite the DDI's best efforts," there was a widespread perception that the paper had "upper-level direction." But it concluded that the behavior of managers below the top level had to be looked at as well. It suggested that there may have been "not so much DCI or DDI direction as... an effort on the part of some managers at the next one or two levels down to be responsive to perceived DCI and DDI desires."

Counterattack

On 3 October 1991, Gates returned to the SSCI to try to rescue his nomination. Earlier regarded as a shoo-in for confirmation following what *The Washington Post* described as a "bloodless" first week, Gates was now being encouraged publicly by Chairman McCurdy of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to resign if he could not "with absolute certainty disprove the charges," a task McCurdy judged was "almost impossible, because it now gets down to his word against that of the analysts...." First-week praise for Gates from such high-ranking former intelligence officials as Admiral Inman and John McMahan, both deputy DCIs under Casey, and his own deft handling of questions on Iran-contra were not by themselves going to put him over the top.

Gates began by noting that it was "discouraging to see that the old battles, the old problems, the strong feelings about management's role in the analytic process... have not diminished in intensity even in the years since I left the Agency." He denied that he or the DI had ever provided "intelligence to please" and defended the integrity of the analytic process. To allege that politicization had polluted analysis over so many years, as Goodman and others had, implied that "hundreds of analysts and managers in CIA either acquiesced in it, ignored it, somehow missed it, or joined it. And that's ridiculous." The "much-maligned" review process, he added, "wasn't easy, but it was far from closed. It was rigorous, but it was fair. People who wanted to be heard were heard. I was demanding and

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blunt, probably sometimes too much so, [but] I never distorted intelligence to support policy or to please a policymaker."

Gates was at pains to leave some daylight between his views and Casey's. There were a number of occasions," he reminded his questioners, "when we would pull Mr. Casey back some." The bottom line, he asserted in an exchange with Senator Hollings, is that "we were not doing Bill Casey's bidding, and we were not doing the Reagan administration's bidding.... We were nobody's toady and nobody's patsy in the 1980s, and the analysts put out a heck of a lot of good analysis."

Gates marshalled several examples of analytic messages he had sent to senior policymakers that had undoubtedly been unpopular. "We published papers saying that... the rate of growth in Soviet defense spending was going down," he noted. "If you think it was fun to publish that when [Secretary of Defense] Cap Weinberger was sitting over in the Pentagon, I think you'll appreciate the situation." And he recalled that the Administration "was absolutely dead certain that they could stop the Soviets from building [a] gas pipeline" in Europe, but we said "that they were going to build the pipeline. And there was nothing they could do about it." Gates concluded that "there [were] a number of occasions where we did work on the Soviet Union that I think made a lot of problems for the Administration."

A Persistent Perception

Gates did agree that the perception of politicization had nagged the CIA's Soviet analysis for years and—more broadly—had "dogged American intelligence for decades." Though Agency Inspector General reports and other studies had "searched in vain for evidence of slanting in our products," the issue, he said, "came up repeatedly in my meetings with analysts and in training courses":

I'd ask analysts, when I would go down into their work spaces to talk with them, if their work had been distorted. Ironically, many felt this happened more often at the branch- and division-chief level, where their drafts were first reviewed, than higher up. But the answer was virtually always no. But they

had heard that had happened for sure in the next branch over. And so I'd go over there, and I'd get the same answer.

To Gates, the real problem was that some analysts confused losing an honest substantive debate with politicization:

When major changes in draft analysis come out of the review process, it is understandable that analysts would be more inclined to blame them on an external source, such as political pressure, than on weaknesses in their own analysis and exposition. No analyst who considers himself or herself to be the best informed person on a subject likes to be challenged. Analysts like to write on subjects they like in the ways they like. And to be told that your specific subject, or the way you present it, is irrelevant to policymakers, or is not persuasive, is hard to swallow.

MacEachin agreed with Gates, pointing out that analysts have to expect challenge as a normal part of the job and be prepared for it. In his testimony, he did not "find it remarkable that when you go to your boss with a judgment that contradicts the boss's view or which gets your boss crossways with his boss, that you really have to have your act together. You have to have your evidence lined up and you have to have your analysis in sharp order." Another senior Agency official, the NIO for Strategic Programs, Lawrence Gershwin, also agreed: "Analysts all grouse about having to respond to the comments of reviewers... including those up the chain," Gershwin said. "But we must all recognize the need to provide a convincing argument to justify our judgments. These judgments are important."

While Soviet intelligence managers lamented the tension that attended internal debate over the Soviet Union, many of them drew the line at what Kay Oliver, echoing Senator Rudman, called "character assassination" of Gates. Oliver noted:

Nothing is more poisonous to the atmosphere at CIA, more destructive to the process of debating issues on the merits, than accusing colleagues of conspiring in or being duped into "politicizing" intelli-

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gence. It is imperative that substantive discussions can take place with an understanding that honest people can disagree, and a realization that few of us this side of heaven have a monopoly on truth.

MacEachin agreed. "Far more often than we'd like," he reminded the Senators, "the evidence is quite legitimately subject to different interpretations." In a veiled reference to Goodman's testimony, he said: "I don't believe it is professional to try to hide behind some kind of attribution of base motives."

Avoiding the Seamy Side

Instead of politicization, Gates's defenders saw at work the old fundamental dispute between schools of thought on Soviet analysis. According to Kay Oliver, the approach followed by Goodman and his supporters had been fundamentally flawed and unbalanced. She testified that while Soviet foreign policy objectives were being pursued on two levels, many analysts in SOVA had paid attention to only one of them:

For many years, analysis of the Soviet foreign policy shop at CIA...focused almost exclusively on Soviet relations with other countries at the level of diplomatic and military support, and treated dismissively...behavior orchestrated by the Central Committee...and the KGB. These institutions...attempted to influence foreign developments through espionage, propaganda...active measures [and] clandestine support for political violence.

Oliver concluded that she had detected little enthusiasm in some quarters of SOVA for analysis of the "seamy side" of Soviet foreign behavior. Instead, "a certain intellectual fastidiousness was at work."

The result, agreed Graham Fuller, was a "highly benign" and mistaken view in SOVA of Soviet goals in the Third World. Behind this view, he believed, was a lack of appreciation for "ground truth" in areas where the Soviets were active. "I personally felt that many [SOVA] analysts may perhaps have been experts on Soviet writings on Third World issues, but few of them had gotten their feet dirty, so to speak, in the dust of the Third World." These analysts, he asserted, failed to notice that the Soviets "played hardball."

Part of the problem, according to MacEachin, was the intellectual baggage Soviet analysts brought with them from graduate school. "We came off campus in the 1960s, and the faculties were teaching [that] the world was a rational place and the Soviet Union was a rational actor and would do things in accordance with...political science paradigms."

Empiricism Versus Experience

In short, Gates's defenders argued that his critics were turning an honest difference of interpretation over Soviet behavior and intentions into out-and-out distortion and intellectual dishonesty. The critics professed not to mind different interpretations as long as they were supported by the available facts. As Jennifer Glaudemans noted, "I was taught that there is a tremendous responsibility in weighing evidence" and that "I had a duty to state when I didn't know certain things in my research."

On the other hand, many experienced managers believed that a narrowly empirical approach often led to mistakes. Graham Fuller called it one of the dilemmas of intelligence work:

Does absence of evidence mean that something is not there or it has not happened? How much should we rely on intuition, judgment, and experience in appraising the likelihood of events or motives or the issue of who benefits from an event? This dilemma can never be solved. SOVA seems to have clung to the idea that the sweeping force of "no evidence" means that we don't think it happened, which is the safe and perhaps appropriate position for a junior analyst. But is a more experienced analyst or manager wrong to examine other considerations even in the absence of evidence that we may never collect?

Analysts, Fuller added, sometimes hid behind a lack of evidence to avoid coming to a conclusion. The problem with this, he said, is that policymakers cannot wait:

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Analysts love to say it is "too early" to make a judgment. But the policymaker has to make a judgment, and right now, dammit! What are we analysts paid for anyway? they will say. If the evidence was that clear, of course, we wouldn't need an estimate....But when we have only a tiny sliver of evidence, is that all that we go on, or do we use our intellects to try to glean the remaining 95 percent of an unknown construct of which we have only one tiny part?

Fuller's observations brought the discussion back to the function of the review process. The inexperience of most analysts, he seemed to be saying, needed to be compensated for by management. When analysts become overly empirical, Fuller argued, more seasoned officers must weigh in:

Is wisdom couched exclusively at the lower levels of analysis, with the "hard facts," or does it reside perhaps nearer the top with senior, experienced officials who have seen much of the world and a lot of politics...? In principle, good people are supposed to be at the top where they can exercise their own judgments about the true import of events. These senior people may appreciate the analyst telling them about what happened, but they will not relinquish the right to interpret events for themselves if they wish.

Everyone agreed that managers had the right to question and even to overrule the conclusions of their analysts. To some analysts, however, such "meddling" by management seemed indistinguishable from politicization, and Fuller conceded this. He added, "That's the way the system is built. And it's very difficult to decide whether the top, senior people are being political or simply being wiser and more thoughtful about certain problems that they deal with."

Kay Oliver made the same point in a different way:

Supervisors of analysis are not simply bureaucratic processors but substantive people, essentially senior analysts themselves directing the work of other analysts, many of them younger and less experienced. To ask these managers to stop using their thought processes, and to put in abeyance perspectives they have developed through long study... would be to rob

our assessments of valuable input.... There is inherent tension between the intellectual autonomy of the analyst and the institutional responsibility for the product.

Repairing the Damage

The Gates confirmation hearings concluded on 4 October, but a vote was not taken until two weeks later. When the votes were finally tallied, it became clear that Gates's testimony had been more persuasive than that of his critics, and his nomination was reported favorably to the Senate by an 11 to 4 margin. The full Senate later confirmed his nomination.

But the open wounds revealed during the hearings lingered in the memories of many intelligence insiders. Of those who had testified during the two weeks, MacEachin seemed the most deeply concerned about the propensity of analysts and managers to go at each other's throats. "This has been a very sad experience for me, Mr. Chairman, just going through this," he said. "Now I have to ask myself, what have we done to ourselves? What have we allowed to happen to ourselves?" He continued:

Have we created a situation in which each time a supervisor challenges someone's analysis, his conclusions, or his treatment of evidence, or his lack of treatment of competing judgments that he or she has to wonder whether a dossier is being started that will someday be pulled out of a drawer? Have we created a readily available devil theory that can be applied at will?

MacEachin exclaimed that it was time to end the recriminations:

We have to say however it got there, let's stop now trying to blame who put it there. Let's have the managers stop talking about the whiny analysts and the analysts stop talking about the bully managers. Let's get a standard of conduct in...the way we go about our business, and let's have that professional

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ethic explicitly eschew the concept of wrongheadedness. Incompetence, stupidity, sloth, all those are legitimate sins that you can complain about, but wrong-headedness...is just not to be there.

"As I said," he concluded, "this is the most troubling, the most disturbing, most serious issue for me."